

From the Rabbi's Desk
Rabbi Manes Kogan
Hillcrest Jewish Center
183-02 Union Turnpike, Flushing, NY 11366
rabbikogan@hillcrestjc.org

Stories with a Twist [47]

Because thou hast mercy in leading the flock
Insights into Exodus Rabbah 2:2
In memory of Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, זצ"ל on the 120th
anniversary of his birth.



Background to Our Story

Exodus 3:1-2 & 9-10

1 And Moses kept the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian; and he led the flock far away into the desert, and came to the mountain of God, to Horeb. 2. And the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush; and he looked, and, behold, the bush burned with fire, and the bush was not consumed.

9. And therefore, behold, the cry of the people of Israel has come to me; and I have also seen the oppression with which the Egyptians oppress them.

10. Come now therefore, and I will send you to Pharaoh, that you may bring forth my people the children of Israel out of Egypt.

The Text: Exodus Rabbah 2:2

ואף משה לא בקנו הקדוש ברוך הוא אלא בצאן, אמרו רבותינו, כשהיה משה רבינו עליו השלום רועה צאנו של יתרו במדבר, ברח ממנו גדי, ורץ אחריו עד שהגיע לחסית, כיון שהגיע לחסית, נזדמנה לו ברכה של מים, ועמד הגדי לשותות, כיון שהגיע משה אצלו, אמר אני לא הייתי יודע שרץ היית מפני צמא, ענה אתה, הרביבו על כתפו והיה מהלך. אמר הקדוש ברוך הוא, יש לך רקמים לנהג צאנו של בשר ודם כך חייך אתה תרעה צאני ישראל, הוי: ומשה היה רועה.

Once, when Moses, our teacher, peace unto him, was shepherding the sheep of Jethro in the wilderness, a goat-kid ran away from him and he chased after it until it reached a shady place.

When it reached a shady place it [the goat-kid] found a pool of water, and the goat-kid stopped to drink.

When Moses reached [the goat-kid], he said. "I didn't know that you were running because of thirst; you must be exhausted!"

He [Moses] carried it on his shoulder and walked back.

The Holy One, Blessed is He, said, "Just as you have compassion to lead the sheep belonging to a human of flesh and blood, so, too, I swear by your life, you will tend My sheep, the people of Israel."



Explaining the Story - What is going on in our story? (Explain the sequence of events)

Comprehension and Analysis Questions

Bonus ? The author of our story seems to imply that Moses' actions provided God with an excellent assessment tool to evaluate Moses' special qualifications as a leader for a most significant task. How do Moses' actions in our story reflect on his unique capacity for leadership? What are the special character traits that Moses shows in our story?

Answer 1 _____

Answer 2 _____

Answer 3 _____

Answer 4 _____

Answer 5 _____

Answer 6 _____

Answer 7 _____

Answer 8 _____

Answer 9 _____

Answer 10 _____

"The Twist" – Or the Lessons We Can Learn from the Text

! Choosing a Good Leader:

- Good leadership is not a popularity contest (Moses is God's pick, not the people's)
- Character traits versus leadership skills: When you possess the right character traits, you might be able to work on your leadership skills. The opposite is not always the case!

- If you can be counted on to work on a small project, you might be able to work on a big one. However, if you can't be counted on to work on a small project, you certainly won't be able to work on a big one!



Moses, the leader of our story, is

- curious and alert (he notices a goat-kid ran away),
- responsible (when the goat-kid ran away from him and he chased after it),
- proactive (he sees a problem and goes after the solution),
- compassionate ("you must be exhausted"),
- caring (He carried the goat-kid on his shoulders),
- humble ("I didn't know that you were running because of thirst"),
- shows concern for the individual (he cares about a single goat-kid),
- and gets the job done (runs after the goat-kid and brings it back).

These superb character traits might not be enough for the making of a good leader, but without them, good leadership is impossible.

God chooses Moses for his excellent character traits, believing that leadership skills, like eloquence, for example, can be learned or made up for by other members of the "team."

The [Lubavitcher Rebbe](#) on Our Story

The [Lubavitcher Rebbe](#) points out that in addition to demonstrating Moses' compassion, the incident holds another important lesson: Moses realized that the kid did not run away from the flock out of malice or wickedness - it was merely thirsty. By the same token, when a Jew alienates himself from his people, [G-d](#) forbid, it is only because he is thirsty. His soul thirsts for meaning in life, but the waters of Torah have eluded him. So he wanders about in foreign domains, seeking to quench his thirst.

When Moses understood this, he was able to become a leader of Israel. Only a shepherd who hastens not to judge the runaway kid, who is sensitive to the causes of its desertion, can mercifully lift it into his arms and bring it back home.